BRITISH COLUMBIA
The Best Place on Earth

ACHIEVEBC
BRINGING OUT THE BEST

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2007EDU0058-000473
May 8, 2007

Ministry of Education

PROVINCE ADDS MEASURES TO SPEED UP SCHOOL SEISMIC WORK

VICTORIA – The Province introduced new measures today that will help school districts speed up seismic upgrades to schools as part of government's $1.5-billion plan to make B.C. schools earthquake safe, Education Minister Shirley Bond announced.

The Province and three of the largest school districts – Vancouver, Surrey and Coquitlam – are working on a new approach to managing seismic upgrades. Under the approach, seismic projects in the three districts will be bundled into groups and tendered as a single contract so that the upgrades are completed more quickly and cost effectively. Industry and Partnerships BC have also been invited to work on this new approach.

"This is a win-win-win for students, parents and school boards," said Bond. "Bundling projects will help school districts speed up planning, design and construction by letting engineers and contractors take what they learn from one project and apply it to another. That will mean students and staff will be in seismically upgraded schools sooner."

Improved scheduling of seismic upgrades will help reduce costs, and there may also be increased savings from economies of scale. Partnerships BC will work with the three school boards to provide support during the design and construction phases.

The Province will also provide additional staff to help boards in the rest of the province to complete their seismic projects more quickly.

"We are working with school boards to upgrade high-priority schools," said Bond. "However, feasibility studies have yet to be completed for more than 40 high-priority projects."

A feasibility study is the first step in seismically upgrading a school. Once the feasibility study is completed, a project agreement is prepared for approval by the Education Minister. Project agreements must be approved before design and construction can begin.

"B.C. school boards are anxious to see seismic upgrades to schools moving forward as quickly as possible," said Penny Tees, president of the B.C. School Trustees Association. "We are optimistic that the government's new measures will help in this process."

-more-

Additional staff with project management expertise will work directly with school districts to complete the feasibility studies and prepare project agreements for approval. They will help oversee the project during design and construction, and report on progress. Boards that lack adequate resources or expertise may also request direct help with design and construction.

-30-

Media contact: Lara Perzoff
Public Affairs Bureau
Ministry of Education
250 356-5963
250 920-9040 (cell)

For more information on government services or to subscribe to the Province's news feeds using RSS, visit the Province's website at www.gov.bc.ca.